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Social Themes as Reflected in Film: Scholarship, Criticism, and Theory

By Leslie Kong

As faculty, we strive to develop methodologies to make more meaningful to students the concepts and principles taught in our courses. Over the years, a growing literature has developed that supports the use of popular films, as well as documentaries, in college and university curricula. This essay is not intended as an exhaustive or comprehensive study of resources in this area, but rather as a guide to works that faculty will find relevant in supporting various courses.

The objective is to demonstrate the numerous ways that popular films can support a range of subject disciplines. The essay is divided into four parts: "Historical Works," including useful reference resources; "Film Genres," with a focus on social themes, as reflected in primarily modern-era American films; "Web Resources"; and "Conclusion."

In *Millennials Go to College*, Neil Howe and William Strauss identify seven core traits of the millennial generation: they are "special," sheltered, confident, team oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. College faculty now must design courses to engage this new generation, whose members perhaps have wider access to mass media material than any generation preceding them. Limitations to the use of popular films derive from

the inherent compromises and realities of film production, box office marketing, narrative flow, and historical accuracy. In his bibliographic essay "Popular History in the Classroom"¹, Charles Becker Jr. alludes to such limitations, recognizing film (and other popular history materials) as a foundation to be built upon.

In *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood*, Robert Toplin suggests that many of the criticisms of cinematic history are unrealistic, since film is a popular medium, and filmmakers inevitably must make compromises for the purposes of narrative flow and continuity. Others, such as Frank Sanello, in *Reel v. Real: How Hollywood Turns Fact into Fiction*, fret that many young people rely entirely on historical information from movies, not realizing the many liberties that Hollywood takes with actual facts. To be considered for classroom use, films must be fully vetted, analyzed, and accepted for what they are—fictional portrayals of actual events with the plot adjustments deemed necessary by filmmakers to promote dramatic flow and

continuity. Excerpts from relevant films, if selected and used judiciously, can be very powerful tools, engaging today's students in ways that written text cannot. *Celluloid Blackboard: Teaching History with Film*, edited by Alan Marcus, recognizes the significant impact that film has on students and sees Hollywood feature films' influence on people's understanding of history as a reality of today's world. Marcus's book raises the question of how teachers can take advantage of students' knowledge of films and help them learn to view films in a critical manner. Contributors encourage teachers to both incorporate films into the history curriculum and develop students' historical film literacy. This volume presents the work of scholars who have conducted empirical studies of film as a tool to teach history.

Historical Works

FOR AN EXCELLENT OVERVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT developments in western European and American film, readers should consult David Cook's *A History of Narrative Film*, which describes how technological innovation, the artistic genius of directors, and political currents have combined to shape the history of film. Both Ephraim Katz's *The Film Encyclopedia* and Halliwell's *Filmgoer's Companion* are standard reference works that serve as compendia to important films, themes, directors, and other artists in the industry. Taking up the mantle of the Halliwell series is *Halliwell's the Movies That Matter: From Bogart to Bond and All the Latest Film Releases*, edited by David Gritten. Diverging from previous Halliwell publications, this is a smaller-format reference work that nevertheless is highly informative, offering about 2,800

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select film entries, with information on the films' availability on DVD, credits, award notations, synopses, assessments, and quotations from critics. It focuses on 2,000 of the most significant films of the past two decades, and includes another 500 film entries that were originally penned by Halliwell. A single volume that provides a broad-brush look at important films to consider is *1001 Movies You Must See before You Die*, edited by Steven Schneider. This guide covers films from foreign countries and the United States, and from each representative era. Abbreviated yet substantive reviews appear in *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide: 2010 Edition*.

Another excellent source for reviews is *Roger Ebert's Movie Yearbook 2009*. Among a number of books that present the collected reviews of Pauline Kael, the notable and late film critic for *The New Yorker*, is *5001 Nights at the Movies: A Guide from A to Z*, which republishes abridged versions of her reviews.

Perhaps one of the best treatments of the social history of the United States and of its movies is Robert Sklar's *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. The author discusses trends in American filmmaking through the mid-1990s, the various films themselves, and their significance to the social, cultural, and political landscape of the country. Michael Wood's *America in the Movies*, while dated, takes a look at selected movies from the past and offers thoughts on the relationship between American social fantasies and the movies. Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy's *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* delineates the Hollywood studio and production system, which was dependent upon stars, genre films, and the widespread ownership of movie theaters by motion picture studios. Audiences during the Depression needed the psychic relief of movies, but also demanded that Hollywood give token recognition to the social realities of the day. As a result, the book points out, films reflected more realism in style and subject matter, which led to a spate of socially oriented films. The authors conclude that the genre of the "problem film" is part of a larger cultural process and cannot by itself change social attitudes unless society is predisposed to such change. This genre can reinforce certain values, giving voice to specific positions for the

public to embrace, provided that certain cultural, social, and political conditions are in place during a given time period.

American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image, edited by John O'Connor and Martin Jackson, argues that historians can use films as cultural documents that reflect the values and prejudices of American society in specific historical eras. Each of the essays in this work examines a specific film (e.g., *Dr. Strangelove*) and how it assists in documenting American social history and reflecting the mood of the country at the time it was released. In *Hollywood's America: United States History through Its Films*, edited by Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, a series of interpretive essays examine how classic films treated American political, economic, and social life. A scholarly examination of the portrayal of the American presidency in film may be found in *Hollywood's White House: The American Presidency in Film and History*, edited by Peter Rollins and John O'Connor. Contributors to this volume's essays include professors from the disciplines of film studies, history, political science, communications, philosophy, and literature. The first eight essays analyze the film depictions of six presidents from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. In the process, they raise questions about the effectiveness of film as a medium for addressing complex issues confronting past American presidents. Not surprisingly, the president most often portrayed on screen is Abraham Lincoln. Another set of essays examines Hollywood's portrayal of the presidency in fictional films (e.g., *The American President*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, and *Bulworth*). The final seven essays concern the depiction of contemporary presidents in films such as Oliver Stone's *Nixon* and *JFK*, *Dick*, *Primary Colors*, and *The War Room*.

Past Imperfect: History according to the Movies, edited by Mark Carnes et al., examines about a hundred films in chronological order according to the subject matter, in critical essays written by historians, journalists, authors, and academics. Prominent contributors include Stephen Ambrose, Eric Foner, Antonia Fraser, Stephen Jay Gould, Anthony Lewis, William Manchester, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Gore Vidal. Most of the films were produced in Hollywood, but various essays

also address Australian, Japanese, German, French, Canadian, British, and independent American films. A similar but breezier volume is Joseph Roquemore's *History Goes to the Movies: A Viewer's Guide to Some of the Best (and Some of the Worst) Historical Films Ever Made*. Each review includes an essay on the historical events covered in the films, brief plot summaries, assessments of the films' historical accuracy and entertainment value, and lists of books for those interested in more historical context for the films discussed. Stuart Kaminsky's *American Film Genres: Approaches to a Critical Theory of Popular Film* provides an overview of genre films, the history of their evolution, and reasons for their popularity. The success of these genre films depends on how well they fulfill the cultural and psychological needs of the audience. Kaminsky presents a variety of methods for analyzing popular films and applying these approaches to both individual movies and the genres to which they belong. The remainder of this essay will address some of these genres.

Film Genres

Gender and Sex Roles

IN *MEDIA MESSAGES: WHAT FILM, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us about Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, Linda Holtzman provides a useful volume for communication studies and other relevant courses, wherein students may examine their own worldviews and experiences, developed in part through their exposure to popular media including film. The book looks at specific films in depth for their portrayal of women and of sexual orientation. The author also comments on how individuals' backgrounds, in conjunction with the role played by sexual- and gender-based oppression, may contribute to misinformation and misconceptions concerning various groups. For an excellent discussion of the portrayal of men in popular film, see Joan Mellen's *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film*. Mellen reviews the portrayal of males over the decades, concluding in the 1970s with an emphasis on the increasingly violent nature of men. Mellen notes that over the years, masculinity in American films has been linked to both patriotism and Christianity. Male heroes have been

predominantly Caucasian, and individuals such as John Wayne, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, and Clint Eastwood all figure prominently in the volume's discussions. Mellen also examines the underlying theme of homosexuality in "buddy" films such as *Deliverance*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *The Sting*.

Those interested in the portrayal of women in popular film should consult Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, now in its second edition. Like the previous work by Mellen, this work addresses (through 1987) the portrayal of women through the decades. Portrayals of women in films are very much reflections of the societal conditions of a particular time. Haskell considers herself first and foremost a film critic and, second, a feminist. As such, she renders a historical study of women's images in film (defined for the most part by men) and avoids polemics in her analyses. Similarly, Marjorie Rosen in *Popcorn Venus* explores trends related to film and women's roles in society, examining the ways in which women have been encouraged to view themselves in films. She discusses how women too often blindly accept the morality and values reflected in films. Rosen views the cinematic woman as a "Popcorn Venus," a hybrid of cultural distortions. Her work takes the reader through the early 1970s.

Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* is considered by many to be the seminal work on the subject. It has been adapted into a film of the same title. This landmark work uncovers moments and characters in primarily mainstream Hollywood films in which homosexuality is evident. For the uninitiated, the work is a revelation, as the author examines underlying or repressed gay themes in numerous films over the years. Its filmography lists films in which obviously lesbian or gay characters appear, and films in which references are made to homosexuality. Raymond Murray's *Images in the Dark: An Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Film and Video* is perhaps the most comprehensive guide and research source on the subject, covering more than 3,000 films and videos. Stephen Stewart's *Gay Hollywood Film and Video Guide: Over 75 Years of Male Homosexuality in the Movies* includes over 400 feature-length films

ranging from the silent era to the early 1990s. James Robert Parish's *Gays and Lesbians in Mainstream Cinema* features plots and critiques for nearly 300 theatrical and made-for-television Hollywood releases. The latter work provides much more detail on casts and on the overall critical reception of films.

Race and Ethnicity

THE KALEIDOSCOPIC LENS: HOW Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups, edited by Randall Miller, examines the development and significance of ethnic images in American feature films. Contributors explore the various ways movies helped shape ethnic groups' perceptions of themselves and the world around them. They relate the history of nine ethnic groups in American life—blacks, Asians, American Indians, Hispanics, Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, and Slavs—to their portrayal in American movies. Hollywood movies gave immigrants a view of what they had to do to become "Americans," and also reflected how other Americans came to view these ethnic groups. From the point of view of these contributors, American feature films emerged as social documents of American cultural history. A subsequent work, *Ethnic and Racial Images in Film and Television*, edited by Allen Woll and Randall Miller, presents twelve chapters, each covering a specific ethnic or racial group. Introductory essays include general overviews of the history and development of each group's images in film and television from the turn of the century to the 1980s, followed by analyses of the literature included in the bibliography. A more up-to-date work by academic librarians Marsha Hamilton and Eleanor Block is *Projecting Ethnicity and Race: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies on Imagery in American Film*. It provides a comprehensive list of English-language books that discuss ethnic, racial, or national imagery within feature films produced in the United States. The films discussed in these works date from 1896 to the early 2000s. Included are books with substantive chapters related to the subject at hand, anthologies and collections that feature one or more essays on the topic, and reference works with background information of value to researchers. Moving beyond the

pedestrian study of positive and negative ethnic images are the essays in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, edited by Lester Friedman. This collection uses a sophisticated approach to the subject matter, as contributors from diverse disciplines explore ethnicity as a complex, multilayered concept. Friedman contends that no matter whether films explore or exploit ethnic characters, in total they show how ethnic groups affect American culture, and how American culture influences ethnic groups. Accordingly, these films contribute to an understanding of the United States as a nation of ethnic people. Norman Denzin, in *Reading Race: Hollywood and the Cinema of Racial Violence*, provides a critical race theory as well as a cultural studies analysis of racially violent films, focusing on African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and Asian Americans. The author argues that recent films have emphasized the most violent aspects of ghetto/barrio life—the very features (drugs, gangsta rap, and gang warfare) that the New Right put a spotlight on—thus contributing to a new cinematic racial order of repression and control.

F. W. Gooding Jr.'s *You Mean, There's RACE in My Movie? The Complete Guide to Understanding Race in Mainstream Hollywood* posits that, given the millions of dollars invested in a single movie, the studios seek to minimize risk by following tried-and-true formulas, thus accounting for Hollywood's reliance on a consistent pattern of racial imagery. The author believes that mainstream movies are important tools used to inform and influence cultural identity. These films routinely present a limited view of minorities, in stark contrast to the broadly developed spectrum of Caucasian characters. The book presents six minority archetypes (e.g., "the comic relief," "the menace to society," "the physical wonder"). The archetypes demonstrate that minority roles largely fulfill hierarchical notions of power and privilege based upon race. Specific examples appear throughout the book, citing actors, roles, and films.

Janice R. Welsch and J. Q. Adams's *Multicultural Films: A Reference Guide* offers educators, librarians, students, and others brief summaries and critiques of a variety of films that touch upon issues of race and ethnicity. Its 150-plus films (including documentaries) depict a variety of cultures and culturally significant issues

that the authors hope will serve as useful starting points for discussion. All the films were available at the time of the book's publication and were chosen with different audiences and age groups in mind. Listed categories include "African American Films," "Arab American and Middle Eastern American Films," "Asian American Films," "European American Films," "Latino/a American Films," "Native American Films," and "Intercultural Films." This volume provides useful contexts and supplementary resource materials to aid in classroom discussions.

For the purposes of this essay, works discussed in this section deal with two specific groups with a long history in this country and continent: Hispanics (or Chicanos, if one prefers) and Native Americans. Works concerning other selected ethnic groups will be addressed in the following section, titled "The Immigrant Experience." English professor Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, who is of Choctaw, Cherokee, and Irish descent, wrote *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*, in which she focuses on a select number of films, from the silent era to the present, including *Little Big Man*, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *Dances with Wolves*. She divides the stereotypes of Native Americans in film into three categories: mental, sexual, and spiritual. A concluding chapter discusses the efforts of Native American filmmakers and screenwriters such as Sherman Alexie (*Smoke Signals*) and Aaron Carr (*War Code: Navajo Code Talkers*). An excellent set of essays on the subject appears in *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, edited by Peter Rollins and John O'Connor. This collection examines such films as *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, *Broken Arrow* (1950), and *Indian in the Cupboard*. Ralph Friar and Natasha Friar's *The Only Good Indian* asserts that Hollywood has perpetuated myths through depictions in films of either the noble red man or the vicious savage. The authors further argue that no other racial group has been made to assume such a permanent fictional identity in movies. For a listing of films (from the silent era to the 1980s) depicting this group, readers should consult Michael Hilger's *The American Indian in Film*. Hilger includes an annotation for each film entry, and precedes the sections on each era of films with very substantive commentaries on the nature of

films produced for that time period.

In *Hollywood as Mirror: Changing Views of "Outsiders" and "Enemies" in American Movies*, edited by Robert Brent Toplin, scholars Allen Woll and Carlos Cortes contribute two particularly relevant essays on scholars' portrayal of Mexican Americans in film. In *Hispanics and United States Film*, Gary Keller traces the introduction and development of Hispanic characters and themes in film in the United States over the decades, and assesses the impact of the Mexican Revolution on the early years of Hispanic-focused film production. He discusses genres that feature Hispanic characters and actors, including the "gang film," Westerns, and the musical "biopic" (e.g., *La Bamba*). A more dated yet still useful monograph is Allen Woll's *The Latin Image in American Film*, which delves into the use of stereotypical images in films, from the days of silent pictures to the end of the 1960s. Frank Javier Garcia Berumen's *The Chicano/Hispanic Image in American Film* chronicles major trends in the depiction of this group in American films from the 1920s to the 1990s. The author ultimately concludes that the indigenous Indian/Mestizo culture and history continue to be submerged in both the real and the film worlds. Also noteworthy are a series of important filmographies by Alfred Charles Richard Jr.: *The Hispanic Image on the Silver Screen: An Interpretive Filmography from Silents into Sound, 1898-1935*; *Contemporary Hollywood's Negative Hispanic Image: An Interpretive Filmography, 1956-1993*; and *Censorship and Hollywood's Hispanic Image: An Interpretive Filmography, 1936-1955*.

The Immigrant Experience

DONALD BOGLE'S *TOMS, COONS, MULATTOES, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* is impressive in its scope and coverage, documenting significant milestones in this subject through the early 2000s. Also useful, but more dated, is Daniel Leab's *From Sambo to SUPERSPADE: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures*. Thomas Cripps, a history professor at Morgan State University, has published a number of studies relevant in this area: *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942*; *Black Film as Genre*; and *Making Movies Black: The*

Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era. Paula Massood's *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film* asserts that, over the last half of the twentieth century, African American film was identified as "city" film in the minds of the public. Specific urban settings, such as New York's Harlem and Brooklyn and Los Angeles's South Central and Watts neighborhoods, were associated, respectively, with African American East Coast and West Coast life. Beyond the 'hood (of the 1990s) and blaxploitation (1970s) films, the author makes the argument that cities are highly politicized locations with a long history in African American (and American) culture. This volume offers in-depth discussions of the films of John Singleton and Spike Lee, among others, within this urban context. For a fairly complete listing and review of such films through the 1980s, see James Robert Parish and George H. Hill's *Black Action Films*. In *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, Ed Guerrero asserts that with the black film wave of the 1990s, filmmakers such as Spike Lee, Robert Townsend, and Carl Franklin, among others, began to take responsibility for "framing blackness" away from the mainstream Hollywood movie industry. He contends that these continual efforts to frame blackness are being challenged by the cultural and political self-definitions of these African American filmmakers.

Omer Bartov's *The "Jew" in Cinema: From The Golem to Don't Touch My Holocaust* provides critical analyses and interpretations of how Jews have been represented in films over the years. Lester Friedman, in his scholarly *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, considers film portrayals of this group from the days of silent pictures to films of the early 1980s. Interestingly, the film industry was dominated by a number of highly placed Jewish executives, including Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg, Harry Cohn, and Jack Warner. Despite this, stereotypes of Jews in film were prevalent from the early days on. Friedman explores the evolution of these portrayals through the decades against the backdrop of historical and social developments (the Nazi movement, World War II, anti-Semitism). The rise in popularity of such artists as Barbra Streisand, Mel Brooks, and Woody Allen, along with

their numerous films, has done much to alter the image of the Jew in recent years. The Jewish American films discussed in this work document the triumphs and defeats of a people assimilating into an alien environment. These films measure the status of Jews at the time of immigration to this country, what they endured over the next eighty years, how they changed, and what they became. As such, these images frozen in time contribute to one's concept of America as a nation of immigrants or outsiders. Another major study in this area is Patricia Erens's *The Jew in American Cinema*. Erens's work examines American feature films from 1903 to 1983 that present Jewish characters or themes. The breadth and coverage of material in this work is impressive. Like many of the other works, it includes a filmography that is useful in identifying and locating relevant films. For a fairly complete listing of films through the early 1990s, readers should consult the *Jewish Film Directory: A Guide to More than 1200 Films of Jewish Interest from 32 Countries over 85 years*. Briefly annotated, this guide has a number of useful indexes—by directors, country of production, subject, and original source material.

Dorothy Jones's *The Portrayal of China and India on the American Screen, 1896-1955* is a pioneering work in which the author samples more than 300 feature and short-subject films, examining the on-screen images of the two countries. Jones goes on to categorize specific character types. For the Chinese, these are the evil mandarin, the pirate, the warlord, the detective, the peasant, the houseboy, the cook, and the laundryman. For the Indians, these are the tribesman, the rajah, the benighted native, and the Bengal soldier. Eugene Franklin Wong discusses the depiction of Asians in mainstream American films in *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures*. The perceived marketability and/or acceptance of film productions, the author contends, had a direct influence on specific production and casting decisions. Wong analyzes films during the period from 1930 to 1975, a long enough time frame to obtain an accurate indication of the portrayal of Asians and Asian-related themes. He also explains developments related to racism against Asians in American feature films. Wong contends that role segregation creates a system in which Asian actors, due to their

ethnicity, are unable to land certain kinds of roles in American films. The roles that Asians are not allowed to obtain are part of the racial domain of white actors. Wong cites specific examples of Asian actors being typecast in subservient, minor roles. One of the first modern surveys of Asian American cinema is Jun Xing's *Asian America through the Lens: History, Representations, and Identity*. In addition to exposing Asian American films to a wider audience, the author aims to offer an alternative approach to the "positive image" or "model minority" dilemma confronting Asian Americans, particularly in American media. This study critically examines the tensions about Asian American identities through a cinematic lens across different film genres. Recently, one of the more important anthologies on the subject was published: *Screening Asian Americans*, edited by Peter X. Feng. Rather than take an oppositional stance on Hollywood depictions of Asian Americans, the editor argues that one should view each depiction within its discursive and historical context. Contributors discuss, in some depth, films such as *Mississippi Masala*, *Chan Is Missing*, and *The Wedding Banquet*.

Another significant collection of scholarly film criticism is Darrell Hamamoto and Sandra Liu's edited work *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism*. Its essays draw from distinct fields such as film studies, Asian American studies, and cultural studies. This volume surveys major narrative, documentary, and experimental films that are highly relevant to the social, political, and cultural life of Asian Americans.

In conjunction with the tragedy of 9/11 and subsequent conflicts around the world, increased attention is being devoted to the treatment of Middle Eastern cultures in the media. Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* documents the many instances of Arab stereotyping in Hollywood films and, for this reason, is invaluable as a reference tool in identifying such films. Shaheen's *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11* poses the question of whether Hollywood's powerful post-9/11 images have destroyed stereotypes of Arabs or reinforced them. Shaheen argues that Arabs continue to be the most maligned group portrayed in Hollywood films. He analyzes over one hundred post-9/11 films, rating specific films

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Letter from the Editor

Lessons from Owen

Drury E. Rockwood
Owen has never been to school. He can't talk, he can't walk, and he is completely dependent on others to care for him. He has no social skills. He is interested only in himself. When he doesn't get what he wants, he cries. And when he does, he just stops crying until the next time. [>>Read More](#)

Tobacco Smoking: A Multidisciplinary Review of the Literature

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according to their use of stereotypes. Tim Jon Semmerling's *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* is written to encourage American film audiences to examine more critically the depiction of "evil" Arabs. Semmerling builds upon Shaheen's work and discusses in greater depth the construction of these stereotypes in films such as *The Exorcist*, *Black Sunday*, *Three Kings*, and *Rules of Engagement*. The author further identifies, within the context of the films' narratives, myths about Arabs and ideologies that the "evil" Arabs are thought to jeopardize.

Outsiders and Outcasts

THIS GENRE INVOLVES THE DEPICTION OF people perceived by some to be outside society's mainstream. Martin Norden provides an excellent discussion of one of these groups in *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*. The author posits that most movies have isolated disabled characters in a way that is consistent with mainstream society's longtime treatment of people with disabilities. In addition, filmmakers have persisted in employing a number of stock stereotypes that have become powerful enough images that they now represent conventional perceptions of disabled people. Norden discusses films such as *The Elephant Man*, *Rain Man*, and *Children of a Lesser God* in this context. A broader view of "outsiders" is evident in the aforementioned *Hollywood as Mirror*, edited by Toplin. This collection of essays focuses on Hollywood productions in the context of historical change, examining Hollywood's depiction of "outsiders" (groups outside the mainstream) and Hollywood's portrayal of "enemies" of the United States (depending on the time period, these may include fascists overseas and domestic ideologues).

Michael Fleming and Roger Manvell's *Images of Madness: The Portrayal of Insanity in the Feature Film* had its germination while the authors were teaching courses focused on the interaction between cinema and psychology. The authors focus on major feature films, produced over a twenty-five-year period, that portray madness in its various forms. Their discussions assume no prior clinical knowledge of madness and thus are quite accessible for

the layperson. The authors identify nine major themes in organizing their work, represented in chapters titled "Society and Madness," "Possession as Madness," "Eros and Madness," "Murder and Madness," "Sanity as Madness," "Drugs and Madness," "Paranoia and Madness," "Madness as Sanity," and "Madness and the Psychiatrist." Films discussed include *The Snake Pit*, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *King of Hearts*.

Some have identified in the film directors Arthur Penn, Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese, and Robert Altman the nucleus of a group that has been referred to as the "American New Wave." Robert Kolker, in *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman*, discusses the works of these directors, the relationship of the directors and their work to each other, and the specific commentary on American society and culture that the works present. Arguably, these directors, in addition to Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas, have been the most influential filmmakers of the past several decades in the United States. Films such as *Dr. Strangelove*, *Taxi Driver*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *Nashville* all have been prescient in foretelling themes important to American society, such as the price of fame and celebrity, loss and fear of being controlled, oppression, and alienation. These directors' films (and others') address people's feelings of isolation and helplessness, with a focus on images of solitude and explosive violence.

Violence

SCREENING VIOLENCE, EDITED BY Stephen Prince, features a number of important essays examining film violence in three contexts: its history, its aesthetic characteristics and structure, and its effects on the individual and society. The book offers an in-depth discussion of the climatic and balletic slow-motion scene in *Bonnie and Clyde*, and devotes an entire essay to director Sam Peckinpah's stylized slow-motion gun battles in *The Wild Bunch*. The aesthetics of ultraviolence and graphic violence are further discussed in essays involving horror/slasher films, and in other influential films such as *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *A Clockwork Orange*. Concluding essays review critics'

arguments that film violence provides a cathartic and thus acceptable release for audiences. Some subsequent empirical studies on media effects, however, have discredited this argument, and instead point to links between viewing film violence and aggressive behavior. Film critic and novelist Stephen Hunter reflects on film violence in *Violent Screen: A Critic's 13 Years on the Front Lines of Movie Mayhem*, republishing therein film reviews that originally appeared over the years in *The Baltimore Sun*. His reviews are much more informed than the average newspaper film review, as he provides social and historical film contexts when discussing films such as *GoodFellas*, *Scarface* (1983), and *The Terminator*. For a discussion of important trends in the study of women in such films, see *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*, edited by Martha McCaughey and Neal King. The stated intent of this volume's editors is to present analyses that "will enable feminists to question assumptions about gender, violence, pleasure, and fantasy." This work also will spur film theorists to question traditional models of female passivity presented in films. It gives considerable attention to the violent roles women play in such films as *Thelma and Louise*, *Silence of the Lambs*, and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

The Politics of War

FOR A FAIRLY COMPLETE GUIDE TO MOVIES concerning wars in the twentieth century, readers should see Robert Davenport's *The Encyclopedia of War Movies: The Authoritative Guide to Movies about Wars of the Twentieth Century*. In addition to the typical production and casting details, this resource provides a brief synopsis of each film, along with interesting facts and mistakes due to factual errors or historical inaccuracies. Another work, the *Encyclopedia of American War Films* by Larry Langman and Ed Borg, offers broader coverage of these films, though it is somewhat dated. Ivan Butler's *The War Film* is a study of major developments in how war is portrayed in British and American films. Unlike others discussed later in this essay, this volume is concerned less with sociological or political themes, or the aesthetics of specific films, and more with broad coverage of the treatment of war through the early

1970s. James Clarke's *War Films* discusses fewer films but presents greater detail, ranging from World War I to Vietnam and including a miscellaneous category titled "Wars in Other Worlds." At variance with these studies is James Chapman's *War and Film*, which, rather than examining the war film as a genre, instead provides a study of the representation of war in film. Chapman categorizes these representations as "Spectacle," "Tragedy," and "Adventure." Each chapter includes a case study of a film (e.g., *Saving Private Ryan*) that focuses on specific themes relevant to the representation of war. Guy Westwell's *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line* is a compact study designed for film studies courses. Serving as an introduction to and an overview of the Hollywood war cinema, this work discusses the history of the war genre, from *All Quiet on the Western Front* to *We Were Soldiers*. Westwell further explores the representations of the Vietnam War (*Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*) and recent reexaminations of World War II (*Saving Private Ryan* and *Pearl Harbor*). He believes that the American film industry has a long history of producing films whose objective is to justify and endorse war, and that the depiction of war in these films has helped to shape public opinion that war is justifiable in achieving political and economic ends. Perhaps one of the best scholarly anthologies on this subject is *Why We Fought: America's Wars in Film and History*, edited by Peter Rollins and John O'Connor. This anthology is organized into five parts, covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the twentieth century; the Cold War and insurgency; and the twenty-first century, including terrorism and asymmetrical conflicts. Most of the contributors have long years of academic experience teaching in universities across the country. A useful filmography offers details relevant to specific wars, directors, distributors, format/length, subgenre, and plot/themes. Lawrence Suid's *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* examines a selection of war movies from 1915 to the 1970s, and is noteworthy for focusing attention on the relationship between the Hollywood establishment and the American military-industrial complex. Until the mid-1960s, Hollywood and the American defense establishment generally worked hand in hand to present patriotic, positive,

morale-boosting images of America's wartime efforts. With the growth of the antiwar movement in the 1960s and adverse coverage of the Vietnam War via evening television newscasts, the film industry backed away from military subjects. Hollywood then began to present another view of the armed services that was widely divergent from its earlier collaborations with the American defense establishment.

Countless books have been published on World War II films. Perhaps the best introduction is Bernard Dick's *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film*. A number of important studies of the portrayal of war on film in this era are available. Roger Manvell's *Films and the Second World War* is international in scope, covering British, French, Russian, Polish, German, Italian, and American films. Manvell does not attempt an exhaustive analysis, but the book's breadth and the author's ability to move effortlessly from documentary to feature film (as well as from country to country) make it a major work of scholarship. One of the best works is film historian Jeanine Basinger's *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. Basinger provides a history of World War II combat films, examining their origins and development. She includes all information directly related to these films, such as production, technology, authorship, and

collection focuses on the manner and extent to which Vietnam War films are grounded in ideology, and on the films' attempts to make some sense of the war for audiences. Recurrent themes include the failure of these films to raise the question of how the United States became entangled in Vietnam and their failure to address the consequences of the war for the Vietnamese. To this day, the war in Vietnam continues to haunt both its veterans and the general public. *From Hanoi to Hollywood* discusses films such as *First Blood*, *Coming Home*, *Platoon*, *Hearts and Minds*, and *The Deer Hunter* in some depth. Included is a selected filmography that denotes films that contain specific images, such as those of American prisoners of war, Southeast Asian refugees, and the antiwar movement. Jeremy Devine's *Vietnam at 24 Frames a Second* takes a broader look at feature films (through the early 1990s), examining films that include tangential references to the war, and films that are symbolic of Vietnam war themes (e.g., *Patton*, *Catch-22*, *M*A*S*H*). It pays critical attention to a variety of film genres, including horror films, comedies, dramas, and action/adventure films. Effectively organized in chronological fashion, the chapters present historical and sociopolitical contexts, along with film criticism and commentaries. A similar publication, but one with wider geographic

Some have identified in the film directors Arthur Penn, Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese, and Robert Altman the nucleus of a group that has been referred to as the "American New Wave."

critical reviews. Much more than a coffee-table book, Clyde Jeavons's *A Pictorial History of War Films* is instead a serious study of war film, international in its point of view, and giving considerable attention to World War II films.

Similarly, a number of studies deal with the Vietnam War and its portrayal in film. *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, edited by Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, is an anthology of essays derived from an academic conference on war films. Contributors include both film scholars and Vietnam veterans. This

coverage, is *Vietnam War Films*, edited by Jean-Jacques Malo and Tony Williams. Its detailed synopses and critical commentaries on specific films are all attributed to named contributors. A specific subgenre of the war film concerns veterans and the attendant sociological and psychological themes related to their return to society. Emmett Early's *The War Veteran in Film* is an important study detailing the depiction of war veterans in what the author has termed "trptych films" featuring the boy before the war, the warrior in the field, and the war veteran after he returns home. Films such

as *The Deer Hunter*, *Coming Home*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Born on the Fourth of July* are typical of this subgenre.

The Rise of the Documentary

JACK ELLIS AND BETSY McLANE'S *A New History of Documentary Film* is a wide-ranging study of English-language documentary filmmaking from the 1920s to the present. The authors concisely discuss major filmmakers and seminal works, as well as advances in approaches. Each chapter concludes with a listing of both major films and books on documentaries made during the time period. The social movements of the turbulent 1960s found a voice in documentary films. The rapid advances, first in video and then in digital technology, along with the growth in media distribution outlets in cable and satellite technology, provided further avenues for documentary filmmakers. This history covers the Ken Burns phenomenon, with Burns's noted PBS series *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, and *Jazz* receiving much deserved attention. Erik Barnouw, former chief of the Library of Congress's Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, contributes *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, a landmark study that traces major developments in this form of filmmaking through the early 1980s. An excellent collection of essays rooted in film scholarship can be found in *Documenting the Documentary*, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski. Intended for students, teachers, and scholars, its essays (all authored by academics) provide concrete analyses of significant documentaries, striking a nice balance between theory and criticism. Barry Keith Grant and Jim Hillier's *100 Documentary Films* is a concise, authoritative guide to key documentary films. The guide is global in perspective, and covers both early films and newer ones. It reviews, in critical commentaries, films by major documentary directors including Robert Flaherty, Humphrey Jennings, Jean Rouch, Errol Morris, and Michael Moore. Each entry provides concise critical analysis while frequently cross-referencing other featured films. This approach helps to place the films in their historical and aesthetic contexts. For an in-depth, scholarly examination of a select

number of documentaries, readers should refer to William Rothman's *Documentary Film Classics*. The author begins with a close examination of Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), which is considered by many to be the film that established the genre of the documentary. Rothman then devotes a chapter each to Luis Bunuel's *Land without Bread* (1932), Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955), Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), Richard Leacock and Joyce Chopra's *A Happy Mother's Day* (1963), and D. A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1967). For a more up-to-date discussion of how such filmmakers as Errol Morris, Michael Moore, and Morgan Spurlock have altered the landscape of documentary filmmaking, see Marsha McCreadie's *Documentary Superstars: How Today's Filmmakers Are Reinventing the Form*. Documentaries that have a definite point of view, use a creative mix of fact and fiction, and insert the filmmaker into the center of the "story" have become the norm these days. The critical reception and popularity of such films as *An Inconvenient Truth* have done much to raise the public consciousness of issues such as global warming.

Web Resources

IMDB: THE INTERNET MOVIE DATABASE is an excellent resource for information on thousands of movies, searchable by film genres, directors, and stars. The national film institutes of the United States, Britain, and Canada—the American Film Institute, British Film Institute, and NBC.ca (National Film Board of Canada)—provide useful starting points to discover information about current and historical mainstream feature-length films, documentaries, and short English-language films. The late film scholar Leslie Halliwell lives on in Michael Binder's Web site *Leslie Halliwell*, where excerpts from various editions of the standard film reference works *The Filmgoer's Companion* and the *Film Guide* are available. Many of Roger Ebert's film reviews may be found at his Web site *Roger Ebert*. Extensive film reviews also are available in the periodicals *Film Quarterly* and *Film Journal International*. The former title is scholarly in nature, with PDFs of sample articles available to nonsubscribers. The latter is a trade publication that provides

movie reviews across all genres (reviews are available via RSS feed). *Film-Philosophy* is "an international academic journal dedicated to philosophically reviewing film studies, philosophical aesthetics and world cinema." The journal is available on an open source basis, and archival issues are accessible through the LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) initiative to participating libraries. *Women Make Movies* (WMM) is a "multicultural, multiracial, non-profit media arts organization which facilitates the production, promotion, distribution and exhibition of independent films and videotapes by and about women." WMM promotes the development of feminist media with a special emphasis on women of color, but it also supports coverage of older women, lesbians, and women with disabilities. Arrangements may be made for WMM filmmakers to appear as guest speakers at venues such as colleges and universities. The *Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation* (GLAAD) blog includes *CineQueer*, a guide to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender images in film. Frameline, the leading distributor of LGBT film and video, runs the world's largest LGBT film festival in San Francisco. Its Web site of the same name serves an international audience. *TWN: Third World Newsreel* is the "oldest media arts organization in the U.S. devoted to cultural workers of color and their global constituencies." It continues to support, produce, and distribute documentaries by individuals of color. A number of important and relevant Web sites pertain to Native American film—*American Indian Film Institute*, *First Americans in the Art*, and *National Museum of the American Indian*. Each of these organizations promotes and encourages positive representations in the media and deeper understanding of Native American culture. The latter is the sixteenth Smithsonian museum, and includes a media archive of more than 12,000 videotapes, motion picture films, and audio recordings dating from 1902 to the present. *Las Cultur@s* features resources on Latinos and Hispanics in the film and television industry. Three useful sites provide relevant access to African Americans in film: *BlackClassicMovies.com*, *Blackflix.com*, and *African American Cinema Gallery*. The first site has both an African American Movie Database and an African American Artist Database. The second provides movie reviews

from an African American perspective. The last site is a touring (to numerous schools and colleges) multimedia exhibition consisting of "hidden information on African American films, drama series, sitcoms ... etc." Valuable sites concerning Jews in film include *JewishFilm.com: The Jewish Film Archive Online*, *The National Center for Jewish Film*, and the *Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive*. Those looking for current news and developments concerning Asian American films and filmmakers should consult *AsianAmericanFilm.com*. *Visual Communications* is a Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization whose mission "is to promote intercultural understanding through the creation, presentation and support of media works by and about Asian Pacific Americans." *Arab Film Distribution*, now celebrating its thirteenth anniversary, provides American and Canadian theaters, universities, and museums with Arab feature and documentary films. Its purpose is to promote and assist in the distribution of Arab films for educational and entertainment purposes. *Filmsite.org* (an "award-winning website for classic film buffs, students, moviegoers and anyone else interested in the great movies of the last century") has two important sites for in-depth coverage of war films: *War and Anti-War Films* and *Greatest War Movies*. The former site offers an extensive essay on this specific genre with coverage from the earliest war films of the silent era to the present. The latter site highlights *Military History Magazine's* 100 Greatest War Films. Documentaries have become so popular that some sites now track other Web sites that are devoted to documentaries, e.g., *The Survey of Documentary Web Sites*. Web sites that promote and provide further information and resources regarding documentary films are *Documentary Films.NET*, *The Documentary Site*, and the *International Documentary Association*. Examples of distributors of documentary films are *The Cinema Guild*, *Direct Cinema Limited*, *Icarus Films*, *New Day Films*, and *Zeitgeist Films*. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) is a major outlet that airs documentary works. Its Web site provides links to series that feature documentaries (many of which may be viewed online) such as *American Experience*, *American Masters*, *Frontline*, and *Nova*.

Conclusion

AS THIS ESSAY SHOWS, FEATURE FILMS OFFER numerous possibilities for augmenting and supporting coursework related to social issues. While writing the essay, I came across many articles by faculty members discussing the merits of using films in their classes. Among the subjects discussed in these articles are criminal justice, ethnographic methods, health issues, controversial issues, social policy, and addiction medicine. Several articles identify relevant films that could be used in support of curricula. Similarly, a recent publication, *Teaching with Movies: Recreation, Sports, Tourism, and Physical Education*, by Teresa O'Bannon and Marni Goldenberg, identifies feature films that may be used in this way. The authors contend that these films can enhance learning objectives when carefully selected, set up in advance, and analyzed afterward. Those interested in incorporating media into multiculturalism courses will benefit from a useful collection of essays titled *Shared Differences: Multicultural Media and Practical Pedagogy*, edited by Diane Carson and Lester Friedman. Contributing essayists identify classic and contemporary Hollywood feature films and documentaries, along with innovative approaches for integrating multicultural media into courses. The book includes week-by-week syllabi that outline specific exercises, bibliographies, and suggested films. Contributors discuss the treatment of a variety of ethnic groups, including those with Middle Eastern, African American, Asian American, Latino, and Hispanic American origins. Another useful book designed to introduce undergraduate students to diversity issues in American film is Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin's *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*. Fifteen chapters that easily may be integrated into a semester-long course provide broad historical frameworks with specific theoretical concepts, along with concise overviews of topics; discussions of representative films, figures, and movements; an in-depth analysis of a single film; and questions for discussion, bibliographies, and filmographies. Documentaries have been increasingly visible following the box office success of such films as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient*

Truth, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and Morgan Spurlock's *SuperSize Me*. At California State University, San Bernardino, as an example, faculty members have used these films in environmental studies, political science, and nutrition courses, respectively. When selected with care, and used judiciously, popular films can be effective educational tools for undergraduates.

Note

1. Charles Becker Jr., "Popular History in the Classroom," *Choice* 45, no.10 (June 2008): 1669-1677.

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Web Resources

- African American Cinema Gallery*
<http://www.black-cinema.org/>
- American Film Institute*
<http://www.afi.com/>
- American Indian Film Institute*
<http://www.aifisf.com/>
- Arab Film Distribution*
<http://www.arabfilm.com/>
- AsianAmericanFilm.com*
<http://www.AsianAmericanFilm.com/>
- BlackClassicMovies.com*
<http://www.blackclassicmovies.com/>
- Blackflix.com*
<http://www.blackflix.com/>
- British Film Institute*
<http://www.bfi.org.uk/>
- The Cinema Guild*
<http://www.cinemaguild.com/>

Direct Cinema Limited
<http://www.directcinema.com/>

Documentary Films.NET
<http://www.documentaryfilms.net/>

The Documentary Site
<http://www.documentarysite.com/>

Film Journal International
<http://www.filmjournal.com/>

Film-Philosophy
<http://www.film-philosophy.com/>

Film Quarterly
<http://www.filmquarterly.org/>

Filmsite.org
<http://www.filmsite.org/>

First Americans in the Arts
<http://www.firstamericans.org/>

Frameline
<http://www.frameline.org/>

Gay & Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD) Blog
<http://glaadblog.org/about/whats-lgbt-in-film/>

Greatest War Movies
<http://www.filmsite.org/greatwarfilms.html>

Icarus Films
<http://www.frif.com/>

International Documentary Association
<http://www.documentary.org/>

IMDB: The Internet Movie Database (CH, Sup'04, 41Sup-0149)
<http://www.imdb.com/>

JewishFilm.com: The Jewish Film Archive Online
<http://www.jewishfilm.com/>

Las Culturas.com
<http://www.lasculturas.com/lib/libFilmTV.htm>

Leslie Halliwell.com
<http://www.lesliehalliwell.com/>

The National Center for Jewish Film
<http://jewishfilm.org/>

NFB.ca (National Film Board of Canada) (CH, Aug'09, 46-6535)
<http://www.nfb.ca/>

National Museum of the American Indian
<http://www.americanindian.si.edu/>

New Day Films
<http://www.newday.com/>

Public Broadcasting System (PBS)
<http://www.pbs.org/>

Roger Ebert.com
<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/>

Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive
<http://www.spielbergfilmarchive.org.il/>

The Survey of Documentary Web Sites
http://www.unc.edu/~twTaylor/teaching/29/web/doc_overview.html

TWN: Third World Newsreel
<http://www.twn.org/>

Visual Communications
<http://www.vconline.org/>

War and Anti-War Films
<http://www.filmsite.org/warfilms.html>

Women Make Movies
<http://www.wmm.com/>

Zeitgeist Films
<http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com/>